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RIGHTS OF PERSONS BELONGING TO NATIONAL OR ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS AND LINGUISTIC MINORITIES

Written statement submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[12 March 1998]

GE.98-11332 (E)

1. The Society for Threatened Peoples International (GfbV) warns of the danger of genocide in Afghanistan. In the Bamiyan area, predominantly inhabited by the ethnic minority of the Hazaras, more than 400,000 people are suffering from a food blockade by the Taliban Islamic fundamentalist movement since August 1997. In December, at the beginning of five months of winter, the grain supply of the Hazaras was already alarmingly reduced because of a crop failure that struck the extremely secluded region in summer. Since the Taliban continue to prevent the World Food Programme and other international relief organizations from providing the region with urgently needed food stocks, and due to the air raid of the Bamiyan airport in late December 1997, a humanitarian disaster is approaching there. Relief organizations report the first deaths by starvation and frost.

2. The Taliban justify their actions by pointing out that the Hazara militia Hizb-i Wahdat, which is supported by the Islamic Republic of Iran and controls the area north-west of Kabul, could profit from the aid supplies. The Taliban leaders deliberately threaten the physical existence of the Hazara civilians by their blockade. According to article II (c) of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 1948, the wilful imposition of living conditions upon a (national, ethnic, racial or religious) group which brings about its total or partial destruction is considered a crime of genocide.

3. If the Taliban succeed in taking control of the Bamiyan area, the Society for Threatened Peoples expects massive pogroms against Hazara civilians. According to reports by Amnesty International and the international media, Taliban troops murdered up to 70 unarmed people, including women and children, in Qizilabad, west of Mazar-i Sharif, on 13 September 1997. Eye-witnesses reported that most of them had their arms and legs broken or were even skinned and then shot. Reuters reported that the perpetrators called the victims "Shi'ite infidels" and selected them because they were not able to speak the Pashtun language.

4. This massacre is not the only one of its kind. A photographer who had travelled in Afghanistan for years was in the Bamiyan area between the end of 1997 and early 1998. He reported to the Society that about 20 Hazara civilians had been murdered in the small village of Kuera-za, south of Bamiyan on 2 January 1998 by the Taliban. The photographer himself had seen corpses with mutilated sexual organs, as well as the dead bodies of raped women and beheaded children.

5. The Society for Threatened Peoples is aware that all groups fighting in Afghanistan have committed extreme violations of human rights against captured opponents and innocent civilians. However, since the Pashtun-dominated Taliban have conquered two thirds of the Afghan territory and directed their attacks against the mujahedin organizations of Tajiks, Usbeks and Hazara in the north of Afghanistan, the struggle for power has changed increasingly into an ethnic and religious conflict. The Taliban, gaining support from former communist cadres, dream of establishing a "Greater Pashtunistan". In those areas ruled by the Taliban, the use of languages other than Pashtun is forbidden. The Hazara, who are of Mongolian descent, speak a Persian dialect. It is well known that the Sunni Taliban mullahs practise an extreme variant

of Islamic fundamentalism, which is characterized by a terrible and arbitrary interpretation of the Sharia. Thousands of Shi'ite Muslims were imprisoned by the Taliban because of their beliefs alone.

6. The responsibility for these severe crimes against humanity lies not only with the Taliban. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are to be criticized, as they initially made the rise of this Islamic movement possible through financial and logistic support, and are the only States Members of the United Nations that have recognized the "Emirate" proclaimed by the Taliban. In 1995, the United States of America supported the Taliban in their conquests, in that the United States Ambassador in Pakistan, John C. Monjo, negotiated a contract between the Taliban and the United States oil company, Unocal, for the building of a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan over Afghan territory.

7. The Society for Threatened Peoples appeals to the Commission on Human Rights to prevent the possible crime of genocide and the further escalation of the civil war in Afghanistan. The Commission should:

(a) Demand that the Taliban movement in Afghanistan lift its hunger blockade of the Hazara immediately and enable the delivery of food provisions to the affected areas. The Taliban should refrain from or prevent all aggression against the Hazara and other non-Pashtun groups as well as against the non-Sunni in the future;

(b) Continue to examine whether the actions of the Taliban against non-Pashtun and non-Sunni parts of the Afghan population meet the definition of the crime of genocide or other extreme crimes against humanity;

(c) Recommend to the Security Council and the Secretary-General to impose an arms embargo on all factions fighting in Afghanistan; and

(d) Call upon the international community, in particular those States that have an influence on the factions fighting in Afghanistan, to pave the way to a peace conference.